



Democratic Principles for the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

The **Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)** was a landmark law for our nation's school children. It reaffirmed the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education* that every child has the right to an equal opportunity at a quality education. As Congress moves to rewrite the law, now known as **No Child Left Behind (NCLB)**, policymakers must not lose sight of the important equity principles underlying this law.

Prior to No Child Left Behind, individual student performance was masked in averages. Because we lacked clear evidence of how students were struggling in the classroom, few felt the urgency to address any problems. NCLB not only produced information about student achievement; it also told parents that schools need to improve for their kids. This enhanced transparency combined with the prospect for remedial action has empowered parents and communities all across the country to hold their schools accountable for the education of their children.

Everyone agrees the law needs to be updated and improved. Democrats believe that reauthorization presents a tremendous opportunity to take our education system into the 21st century and ensure all students have access to a world-class education.

A fundamental rewrite of NCLB must reflect current best practices and protect students' rights in the process. We can alter individual roles and responsibilities, but maintaining a clear focus on students is critical if we want to uphold the promise of ESEA. To be successful, reform must be consensus driven.

Successful reauthorization requires a focus on the following key areas:

Guaranteeing all students have access to a world-class education regardless of background or zip code. Policymakers cannot forget the vital civil rights component of our nation's education law. Our nation still has more work to do to ensure that all kids have access to a world-class education. In light of No Child Left Behind, the evidence is irrefutable that all kids can learn and succeed despite their zip code or family income.

Ensuring states set high-standards and goals to ensure students graduate from high school, college and career ready. To be competitive as individuals and as a nation, schools must be preparing students for the workforce of the 21st century. Today's students will not only be competing with their neighbors for jobs; they will be competing with workers and entrepreneurs from all over the world. It is time for federal policy to support state efforts to meet that growing challenge.

Providing states more flexibility to craft their own accountability systems while ensuring schools remain accountable for all students. Accountability systems should include a richer index of measures including growth, graduation rates and a high-quality, modern assessment system. States and school districts should be empowered with the flexibility to improve schools based on their student, school and community needs whether it is extending the day, offering wraparound services or providing a new curriculum. However, such an accountability system must continue to support the simple idea that low-performing schools should be identified and required to improve. Although the federal government cannot be expected to micromanage improvements to an individual school, nor should it try, it can and it should require action on behalf of students where willingness to act otherwise does not exist. Performance must be transparent to parents and communities so that they can participate in efforts to improve their schools and support their success.

Supporting a professional environment for teachers and school leaders. Teachers and school leaders should be allowed to get back to doing their jobs. They should be provided with the information and resources they need to succeed. Modern, locally-driven evaluation systems, developed in collaboration with both teachers and school leaders, should be used to improve instruction and promote professional development. Teachers and school leaders must also have access to targeted training, adequate time to collaborate with one another, and working conditions that support student success.

Providing additional resources and improving access to those resources. Districts and schools are facing enormous economic challenges. Federal support is critical to maintaining continuity for schools in these difficult times. And while increasing funding is not the sole solution, it is far from irrelevant. Programs should be consolidated so that districts can better and more easily access available funds. Federal policy should support more flexibility in terms of what federal dollars can fund at the local level while effectively overseeing the taxpayers' critical investment in public education. Taxpayers deserve to know that funds are being spent wisely in support of students.

Policymakers of all stripes agree that substantial changes are needed to our nation's education law that reflects what we have learned in the last decade. That's why we need to be working together, not apart, on behalf of all of our nation's school children.